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SUBJECT: FRENCH GAERC RESPONSE: CUBA, MIDDLE EAST, AFRICA

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶11. (C) Summary. On June 13, MFA Deputy Office Director for CFSP Mathieu Carmona said Cuba will be the primary focus of the June GAERC. Carmona said that the COREPER meeting ran late into the evening of June 12 and that some of the resulting agenda items were a surprise; he commented that the Slovenian Presidency seemed to wish to load the agenda for its last GAERC as heavily as possible. The elimination of the Restrictive Measures on Cuba, and concurrent opening of a one-year human rights dialogue, will be the most noteworthy outcome. NEA topics will not be a focus, though we report below on current French thinking on Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Israeli-Palestinian Peace. Possible EC efforts in Somalia and possible sanctions against individual Sudanese authorities will be the main AF topics of interest. Carmona said both Zimbabwe and the Western Balkans would next be discussed at the Political Director level leading up to the June 19-20 European Council. Carmona acknowledged that the apparent failure of the Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty would be a preoccupation at the GAERC, but said the scheduled agenda would still be followed. End summary.

CUBA

¶12. (C) Carmona described the elimination of the Restrictive Measures against Cuba as the biggest issue for this month's GAERC, marking the opening of a one-year dialogue on human rights that recognizes recent positive signals from the regime and will require more concrete steps from Cuban authorities to remain open beyond the initial timeframe. Carmona said that for France, the decision to open even a frank and "demanding" dialogue was difficult, and acknowledged that in many ways this step is a "bet," with unknown outcomes, for the EU. He noted that two delegations, Czech and Swedish, still have reservations about the change in policy and that the decision will be made at ministerial level.

MIDDLE EAST

¶13. (C) Carmona said that the GAERC will have no conclusions about the Middle East, though German FM Steinmeier will brief on his recent visit to the West Bank and Gaza. Carmona reported that EU member-states are still divided about the enhancing or "upgrade" of EU relations with Israel, which provoked a protest letter from the PA Foreign Minister. He

said the French view is that the upgrade needs to be more closely linked to (though not conditioned on) the peace process. Any discussion of Iran will follow HR Solana's briefing on his current trip to Teheran.

Iran

¶4. (C) In separate discussions, GOF officials have emphasized agreement with us on the need for the EU to "transpose" measures called for under UNSCR 1803 and lament the Union's signal failure to follow through as expected or move forward on additional measures. Although the Embassy had few interactions with the GOF since last month on the issue, French MFA NEA A/S-equivalent Jean Felix-Paganon told visiting NEA A/S Welch June 12 he shared our concern about the remorseless progress of the Iranian nuclear program. He referred to the addition of more centrifuges at its facilities as the creation of an ever more difficult fait accompli. The situation, Felix-Paganon warned, is becoming increasingly complex and could become impossible to reverse peacefully after a certain point. The international community will, at that time, face an uncomfortable set of alternatives, including acquiescence.

¶5. (C) When asked about prospects for EU Higher Representative Solana's impending trip to Tehran, Felix-Paganon was pessimistic. He doubted the Iranians will budge; they are playing for time (waiting out this U.S. administration and the transition to a new one.) There is no interest within the broad EU to move on sanctions especially

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as summer approaches and Europe goes on vacation. Welch asked whether there was any possibility for additional EU sanctions if Solana's mission fails. Felix-Paganon responded that it would initially depend on the nature of the Iranian rejection. If it is a flat no, maybe. If it is more "temperate," there is no chance for the EU to rally around a strong consensus. In Felix-Paganon's view, there is really no alternative except to pursue "alternative sanctions possibilities," such as those being discussed by the P-5 1 political directors. This involved identifying and closing off loopholes and focus on Iran's oil and gas industries. Septel will provide further details from this discussion.

Iraq

¶6. (C) Abundant cable reporting from the U.S. mission in Iraq and from Embassy Paris, mostly in the form of Paris Points, has documented France's intense engagement with Iraq since the last GAERC. French FM Kouchner paid his second visit to Baghdad at the end of May/beginning of June to confer with Iraqi and USG officials as well as open a French embassy office in the Kurdish city of Irbil. In addition, France sent the MFA number two to the Iraq Compact ministerial in Stockholm. Kouchner reportedly agreed to meet with S/I Satterfield for further consultations on Iraq in Paris either at the end of June or beginning of July. Meanwhile, French MFA NEA A/S-equivalent Jean Felix-Paganon discussed Iraq with visiting NEA A/S David Welch on June 12, particularly in the context of what France is trying to do to help normalize Iraq's relations with its Arab neighbors. The suspicions and slowly changing mindsets of Iraq's Sunni-majority Arab neighbors made it hard to accept the reality of a majority Shi'a-dominated Iraq. Some Iraqi leaders, like Prime Minister Maliki, prefer to keep Arab efforts to "reintegrate" Iraq weak. The paradox, according to Felix-Paganon, is that Iraqis cannot have a meaningful internal dialogue leading to national reconciliation without support from their neighbors, but those neighbors are ambivalent about Iraq recovering its full independence. He noted as well that the U.S. presence and role in Iraq was a complicating factor for Iraq's neighbors in terms of dealing with Iraq.

¶7. (C) In terms of France's bilateral relationship with Iraq, Felix-Paganon said the MFA continues to review what more it can do. That effort should accelerate with the recent formal opening of the office in Irbil, which will eventually include a cultural center and have a commercial officer on its staff. France still has the goal of establishing an embassy office in the Shi'a south -- most likely Basrah as originally planned despite speculation after Kouchner's visit that it would instead be Nasiriyah -- but everything depends on security conditions. Felix-Paganon reported that Iraq's defense minister would soon visit Paris to ask about purchasing French military equipment (for which current French laws would have to be amended).

¶8. (C) With respect to Europe, Felix-Paganon said that France would use its upcoming presidency to "energize" EU discussion of a joint paper France had prepared with the UK and Sweden to increase European engagement with Baghdad. Kouchner's adviser on NEA issues, Christophe Bigot, interjected that EU Higher Representative Solana and German FM Steinmeier were considering visits to Iraq, although there was as yet no firm timeframe. He observed that Steinmeier's visit would be a "breakthrough." Felix-Paganon expressed hope that the EU collectively and on the level of member states would undertake more "symbolic gestures," but he doubted there would be much of substance. Anything involving financial assistance was extremely difficult, with the one possible exception being aid to Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria. He noted, however, that this was not easy since the European Commission, which recognized the seriousness of the problem, was not always able to persuade the European Parliament, which controls the budget, to come up with the money needed. Further details from A/S Welch's discussion will be provided septel.

Lebanon

¶9. (C) As Embassy Paris has reported by cable and in Paris

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Points, the GOF remains heavily engaged in terms of the situation in Lebanon. French MFA DAS-equivalent for the Levant Ludovic Pouille on June 12 expressed broad agreement with points made in our latest demarche, although he asked why we had not included anything on the UNIIC and Special Tribunal. NEA A/S Welch discussed Lebanon and Syria extensively with French officials June 12, and Embassy will report details septel.

Israeli/Palestinian Peace

¶10. (C) French MFA DAS-equivalent for the Levant Ludovic Pouille indicated broad agreement June 12 with the points in our latest demarche on Israeli/Palestinian peace. Visiting NEA A/S Welch discussed this subject with French officials on June 12, the details of which Embassy Paris will report separately (notal). French MFA officials expressed ongoing interest in and support of the Annapolis process as well as parallel efforts following from the December 2007 Palestinian donors conference in Paris and the upcoming Berlin conference on police/rule of law.

AFRICA

Somalia

¶11. (C) Carmona highlighted a short but important conclusion of the June GAERC, opening the development by the EC of a paper on policy options for Somalia. Though piracy in the Gulf of Aden provided the impetus for this agenda item, the

paper will evaluate broad policy options, including long-term possibilities such as Coast Guard training for Somalia and Yemen. Carmona said the paper may be available for discussion as early as the late July GAERC, the first the French will chair. (Carmona highlighted Commissioner Michel's personal interest in Somalia as one reason this effort will proceed quickly and may bear fruit.)

Great Lakes

112. (C) Carmona said the conclusions will include a lengthy statement on the Great Lakes region, but with no decision, just acknowledging status updates, which include some positive developments in the DRC and Burundi.

Sudan

113. (C) Carmona reported that Monday's declarations will signal the EU's intention to pursue sanctions against individual Sudanese authorities. The GOF views the EU's willingness to undertake such autonomous sanctions as a positive change in policy. Carmona noted that traditional measures like visa bans and banking restrictions might play well with European publics, but might not effectively pressure the individuals in question. Carmona said the GOF does not want to target the Khartoum regime per se, for fears that could backfire.

114. (C) In separate consultations on June 9, MFA and Presidency officials covered some of reftel AF issues with AF/C Director Wycoff. On Sudan/Chad, they stressed the need to consider sanctions on Chadian rebels and JEM in order to encourage both to develop political dialogues with the Chad and Sudan governments and the need to preserve the North-South CPA. They did not believe that sanctions against Daoussa Deby Itno were appropriate at this time as they could alienate N'Djamena and because there was no clear evidence that Daoussa was involved in the recent JEM attacks on Khartoum. We reinforced the need to consider various strategies to pressure the Chad government to prevent the JEM from drawing from and through Chadian territory, including various sanctions mechanisms. The French have proposed that other parties providing financial support to JEM be considered for sanctions. Broadly speaking, the French favor parallel sanctions and the threat of sanctions against rebels in both countries in order to promote political dialogue and eventually a compromise between the two governments and their

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respective rebel elements. The French remain supportive of both UNAMID and EUFOR and encourage rapid deployment of the former, although they are aware of Sudanese obstacles. The French agreed on the need to limit LRA activity in the region but were not certain that there is reliable evidence showing a long-term LRA presence in C.A.R. They said they would investigate the LRA presence there, and try to determine if the LRA is working to expand its support among the Zande ethnic group.

Zimbabwe

115. (C) Finally, Carmona said that Zimbabwe will be discussed in next week's European Council, with a paragraph already agreed between France, Slovenia and the UK on the deterioration of the ongoing electoral campaign. Carmona said France's position is that the second round of elections must take place and that the EU must lay an expository marker before then to denounce recent developments and call for appropriate conduct of the second round. Carmona commented privately that the GOF has demarshaled all SADC countries offering them French financial aid for observer missions, none of which was accepted. The AU was willing to accept the aid, but for a general election observer fund, rather than

specifically for Zimbabwe. As a partial result, too few African election observers are coming, too late. Though there will be no explicit statement from the EU, the GOF "deplores" the increasing silence and failure to act responsibly of the majority of Zimbabwe's neighbors. Carmona further observed that the language in the recent EU-U.S. summit declaration on supporting South African President Mbeki's interventions in Zimbabwe "slipped past" the French, who have not seen Mbeki as particularly effective. He explained that as the French do not expect any such efforts to bear fruit and they do not wish to make positive statements now that may come back to haunt them following the elections, as is highly possible, if most of Zimbabwe's neighbors accept the election results.

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